



*Robert Horwitz*  
*Telephone: (510) 987-0887*  
*Email: robert.horwitz@ucop.edu*

*Chair of the Assembly of the Academic Senate*  
*Faculty Representative to the Regents*  
*University of California*  
*1111 Franklin Street, 12th Floor*  
*Oakland, California 94607-5200*

July 29, 2022

**MICHAEL BROWN**  
**PROVOST AND EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT**  
**ACTING VICE PROVOST ACADEMIC PERSONNEL**

**Re: Proposed Workgroup to Explore the Future of Graduate Student Funding**

Dear Michael:

At its July 2022 meeting, the Academic Council endorsed the attached letters from the Coordinating Committee on Graduate Affairs (CCGA) and the University Committee on Research Policy (UCORP). The letters describe how the recent unionization of graduate student researchers (GSRs) complicates the faculty relationship with GSRs in ways that also call into question the long-term viability of the University's graduate education funding model. Council endorsed the Committees' recommendation that the University convene a joint workgroup to investigate and analyze these issues.

The Council joins CCGA and UCORP in expressing our strong support for graduate students and their well-being. We fully support the right of graduate students to unionize, but we also want to ensure that unionization does not harm the all-important faculty-graduate student mentor-mentee relationship. Unionization has highlighted the need for UC to carefully differentiate between a GSR's work as a student and their work as an employee. We share the Committees' concerns that unionization could increase faculty grant costs and expose PIs to financial risks for which they would not be able to budget effectively. This would encourage faculty to hire research staff instead of graduate students, and ultimately harm graduate education and research. For years, the university has benefitted from a loose melding of graduate training and graduate financial support, which seems no longer possible in the context of contractual obligations. We think the new relationship between faculty and GSRs points to the urgent need to reassess the nature of graduate education funding. A joint Senate-Administration workgroup is best positioned to explore institutional mechanisms that will most effectively protect both the viability of investigator-driven research operations, support graduate students and their quality of life, and protect the mentor-mentee relationship.

We ask the Office of Academic Personnel to take the lead on forming a joint workgroup to address these issues in the 2022-23 academic year. We look forward to working with you on next steps. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have additional questions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Robert Horwitz".

Robert Horwitz, Chair  
Academic Council

Cc: Academic Council  
CCGA  
UCORP  
Chief of Staff Peterson  
Campus Senate Directors  
Executive Director Lin

Encl.



## COORDINATING COMMITTEE ON GRADUATE AFFAIRS (CCGA)

Andrea M. Kasko, Chair  
[akasko@g.ucla.edu](mailto:akasko@g.ucla.edu)

## ACADEMIC SENATE

University of California  
1111 Franklin Street, 12<sup>th</sup> Floor  
Oakland, California 94607-5200

July 18, 2022

**ROBERT HORWITZ**  
**ACADEMIC SENATE CHAIR**

Dear Chair Horwitz,

CCGA offers the following comments regarding the potential impact of graduate student contract negotiations on graduate students, their advisors, and the UC research enterprise. CCGA strongly supports the UC graduate students and recognizes that the graduate education funding model is fundamentally broken. Many graduate students are paid to do research towards their doctoral dissertation or thesis (as a GSR) and simultaneously receive academic credit for this work. The combination of GSR appointment and academic credit enables students to generate the substantial body of work required for a dissertation/thesis; however, it is difficult to discretely determine which part of the work is done for academic credit and which for salary. The two are inextricably intertwined in most cases. The role of a GSR is very different from a staff researcher appointment. Paid research staff have an employee/employer relationship with their research supervisor, whereas GSRs have a mentor/mentee relationship not only with their research advisor, but with additional faculty on their dissertation or thesis committee. In this way, a GSR appointment functions more like an apprenticeship, in which the apprentice (GSR) learns a trade or art from a skilled employer (PI faculty member). Furthermore, this mentor-mentee relationship between students and their doctoral committee chair and committee members extends well beyond the time (years to decades) in which the mentee is a student. Such relationships are often described as an academic family tree, a term that would be outright strange to describe an employer/employee relationship.

CCGA is concerned that classification of graduate student mentees as mere employees does not recognize the complexity of these positions, that they are first and foremost students. Equally, faculty mentors are educators first. The fundamental practice of educating graduate level researchers should not, in the process of unionization, be reduced merely to an employer/employee relationship. Relatedly, it is imperative that collective bargaining agreements do not affect or impact inherently academic issues, such as degree requirements, evaluations of academic progress, etc. Looking towards the future, we urge the systemwide Academic Senate to convene a workgroup to investigate and analyze the graduate education funding model.

Sincerely,

Andrea M. Kasko  
CCGA Chair

c: Susan Cochran, Academic Senate Vice Chair  
Monica Lin, Academic Senate Executive Director  
Michael LaBriola, Academic Senate Assistant Director  
CCGA Members

# UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA, ACADEMIC SENATE

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UNIVERSITY COMMITTEE ON RESEARCH POLICY (UCORP)  
Karen Bales, Chair  
Email: [klbales@ucdavis.edu](mailto:klbales@ucdavis.edu)

University of California  
Academic Senate  
1111 Franklin Street, 12th Fl.  
Oakland, California 94607

July 19 2022

ROBERT HORWITZ  
CHAIR, ACADEMIC COUNCIL

RE: Impact of Graduate Student Unionization on Research

Dear Robert,

UCORP is sending slightly revised comments regarding the potential impact of graduate student contract negotiations on principal investigators and the UC research enterprise. UCORP's comments are meant to complement the letter to you from CCGA Chair Andrea Kasko (dated July 18, 2022).

UCORP strongly supports the UC graduate students and appreciates their contributions to the research mission of the UC. We are concerned that as a result of union negotiations, increased GSR salaries and benefits will have unintended consequences on graduate training. Grant budgets are fixed, and there is a fear that if graduate student costs become too prohibitive, PIs will hire post-doctoral researchers or staff instead of graduate students. Because many graduate programs depend on external grant funding for student support, this could lead to a decrease in graduate student enrollment and thus opportunities for future graduate student education, at a time when the legislature is also expecting increases in enrollment.

UCORP urges UCOP to consider mechanisms to keep increased costs of GSRs revenue-neutral for investigators, such as (but not limited to) institutional reductions of graduate student tuition for GSRs. UCORP also recommends that the graduate student funding model as a whole be considered given the potential aspects of unionization, frozen federal grant amounts, and other concerns.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Karen L. Bales".

Karen Bales  
Chair, University Committee on Research Policy